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Expatriate leadership competencies and performance: a qualitative study

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate leadership competencies of expatriate managers working within the UAE and identify if these competencies are unique from those needed in their home country. Additionally, the paper aims to identify how new competencies expatriate leaders have developed while in their current position and how this enhances their ability to better manage staff in the UAE. Leadership competencies are skills and behaviors that contribute to enhanced performance. While some leadership competencies are essential to all firms, some distinctive leadership attributes may be particularly relevant to organizations possessing a large expatriate community.

Design/methodology/approach – Personal interviews and stratified sampling were used to examine the qualities and skills relating to expatriate managers' success in leading UAE organizations. The research design did not differentiate between the origins and ethnicities of the leaders. The leaders, whether American, European, Indo-Pakistani or Asian, were treated as one entity.

Findings – Factors such as communication ability, team building qualities and ability to handle local nationals were found to have a significant effect on expatriate adjustment and success in managing UAE organizations.

Practical implications – By investigating specific competencies and skills that expatriate managers need to lead organizations in the UAE and the broader Gulf region, the study informs organizations on how they can better identify and develop leadership skills that lead to enhanced performance.

Originality/value – The study focuses on leadership competencies within the expatriate community of the UAE.

Keywords Performance, Leadership, Qualitative, Cross-cultural management, Competencies, Expatriate

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The question whether management competencies transcend culture is currently being debated among researcher scholars (Bealer and Bhanugopan, 2014). Recent studies suggest that managerial attitudes, beliefs and behaviors "are different across cultures and that these differences" reflect differences in management practices (Bealer and Bhanugopan, 2014, p. 293; Duyar *et al.*, 2010). Accordingly, the normative managerial best practices endorsed in the management literature may not be universally applicable. Differing national cultural orientations may affect expectations from leaders and likewise from subordinates. The UAE and the other Gulf countries of Qatar, Bahrain,

Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia have a large contingent of expatriate managers and employees. This multicultural workforce can either stimulate creativity and innovation because of the diversity in perspectives or create conflict, frustrations and stress as a result of incompetent leadership or poor management (Stahl *et al.*, 2010).

Our study investigates how leadership competencies of expatriate managers working in a multicultural environment would support organizations in achieving best performance results from the workforce and avoid destructive workplace conflicts and high employee turnover. In other words, the study identifies unique leadership competencies that enable expatriate leaders to motivate a multicultural workforce to perform well in addition to gaining their commitment to their workplace. In this study, leadership competencies are researched in the UAE which feature one of the most multicultural environment in the world (Bealer and Bhanugopan, 2014; Elanain, 2010).

This paper builds on the body of research on expatriate leadership competencies. Leadership competencies are skills and behaviors that contribute to enhanced performance. While some leadership competencies are essential to all firms, there may be distinctive leadership attributes that are particularly relevant to organizations possessing a large expatriate community. Thus, our research investigates leadership competencies of expatriate managers working within the UAE and identifies if these competencies are unique from the competencies needed in their home country. In addition, the study aims to identify how new competencies expatriate leaders have developed as a result of their current position and how this enhances their ability to better manage staff in the UAE.

The paper is structured in the following way: First we provide the motivation for examining leadership competencies in the UAE. Second, the theoretical background on leadership competencies is presented, including expatriate leadership competencies and leadership specifically in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Third, an explanation of the methodology undertaken to examine expatriate leadership competencies is provided. Fourth, the findings are summarized and set out in tables. These findings are than discussed, and finally, practical implications, research limitations and future research are outlined.

Why examine leadership competencies in the UAE?
The UAE is a mixture of traditional Arabic values and Western influence which has accelerated in recent times due to the influx of foreign workers as a result of the boom in the oil industry. Due to the strong international influence, there is an ever-increasing need to fill management positions with expatriate leaders. This is necessary as UAE nationals often do not possess the experience, qualifications or traits needed to successfully undertake the duties required of the positions (Al-Khazraji, 2009). Limited availability of appropriate host country staff is a motivator for organizations to send expatriates on overseas assignments (Pires *et al.*, 2006). The UAE's literacy rate of approximately 78 per cent limits the availability of local nationals for employment in many sectors of the UAE industry (Datamonitor, 2008). Most UAE nationals shun blue collar jobs, selecting employment in public sector organizations or show a preference for private sector jobs with a high salary and good conditions (Wilkins, 2001). Both organizations and the nation stand to benefit from the experience and abilities of expatriate leaders; therefore, it is imperative that they possess the ability to effectively manage local staff. Expatriates need to be aware how imposing their own cultural

values may affect the staff and the organization. They have to maintain an awareness of the national culture while applying their norms and values and utilizing their own leadership styles.

The skills and abilities which leaders demonstrate in their positions have a major impact on their performance. Leadership both at the macro and micro level is an important determining factor of success in the marketplace. It permeates all aspects of the organization in their outlook, philosophy and working norms, regardless of the strengths of the other facets of the operation (Roy, 1977). Good leaders are seen as those who can cope with multiple demands and undertake numerous activities besides handling difficult and complex situations without affecting their performance, cognitive ability or suffering from undue stress (Kets de Vries, 1989). Wood and Vilkinas (2007) listed a number of attributes considered essential for chief executive officers (CEOs) to successfully execute the duties of their position. These attributes are equally applicable to other local senior organizational leaders. This study investigates the competencies displayed by expatriate leaders and how they use these to enhance their ability to lead UAE organizations. It examines how their awareness of culture differences affects their ability to apply competencies relevant in contributing to the success of the local organizations.

Literature on leadership competencies

The competencies that leaders display in their jobs have a profound effect on how they perform in their roles. Leadership is an important determining factor of success in the marketplace. It permeates all aspects of the organization and reinforces the strengths in other facets of the organization (Chi and Pan, 2012; Roy, 1977). Good leaders are seen as those who can cope with multiple demands and undertake numerous activities in addition to handling difficult and complex situations. They work at peak levels for sustained periods of time without experiencing negative effects on their performance and cognitive ability, and also without sustaining personal suffering from undue stress (Kets de Vries, 1989). Wood and Vilkinas (2007) listed a number of competencies considered essential for CEOs to successfully execute the duties of their position. These include possessing an achievement orientation attitude, a humanist approach, maintenance of a positive attitude and a preference for inclusiveness, integrity and demonstration of an awareness of self. These attributes are equally applicable to leaders throughout the organization.

An organization's success is also closely related to its leader's emotional intelligence (Adler, 2008; Schlaerth et al., 2013). A number of researchers (Goleman et al., 2004; Macaleer and Shannon, 2002; Schlaerth et al., 2013; Wolff et al., 2002) have written about emotional intelligence and the role it plays in effective leadership. Giorgi (2013) defines emotional intelligence as the ability to monitor your own and other people's feelings and emotions "to discriminate among them and to use this information" to inform your thinking and actions. A study by Schlaerth et al. (2013) supports the hypothesis that emotional intelligence is positively related to constructive conflict management. Schyns and Meindl (2006) suggested that the study of emotional leadership has developed from the current prevailing theories on charismatic and transformational leadership, particularly as it applies to the workplace. Salovey and Sluyter (1997) interpreted emotional intelligence as the ability to manage emotions and suggested that it involves the perception of feelings, their use in complementing the thinking process and of

controlling them to enhance logical development and personal growth. Goleman (1999, p. 317) suggested that emotional intelligence is "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, in motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions both in ourselves and in relationships". An emotional approach to leadership is less cognitive in nature and focuses more on managing one's and others' emotions to achieve results (Schyns and Meindl, 2006). In other words, the human element or soft human touch is of paramount importance in not only managing people but also in helping them work at their full potential. Emotional intelligence has been described as five competencies which are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005; Goleman et al., 2002). Each of these competencies is equally critical in assessing leadership skills (Cherniss and Goleman, 2001). Wong and Law (2002) linked the social aspect of emotional awareness to the quality of leaders' interactions with others. George and Zhou (2002) made the determination that leaders having higher levels of emotional intelligence were shown to use their emotions to make better decisions and impart enthusiasm to others through their relations with staff (George, 2000).

Mumford et al. (2007) produced a list classifying leadership skills into four distinct categories. These are cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, business skills and strategic skills. The cognitive skills are related to the collection, processing and distribution of information (Zaccaro, 2001). The interpersonal skills are involved with dealings with others and being influential (Cheruvelil et al., 2014; Katz, 1974; Mumford et al., 2000a). The business skills relate to the management of resources (Agbim, 2013), including equipment (Katz, 1974), staff (Luthens et al., 1988) and finances (Copman, 1971; Katz, 1974). The strategic skills are concerned with the creation of a vision (Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Dries and Pepermans, 2012), identifying problems (Cox and Cooper, 1989; Yukl, 1989) and devising solutions (Mumford et al., 2000b), as well as possessing strong cause-and-effect identification abilities (Mumford et al., 2000a).

In addition, leadership skills that create a working environment which emphasizes social relationships have been described as "soft leadership skills" (Awan et al., 2015; Sumner et al., 2006). These skills facilitate a cooperative working environment which enables leaders to manage interpersonal relationships, promote collaboration between staff members as well as functional areas and encourage mutual cooperation directed toward successful accomplishment of organizational objectives. One of the skills necessary to promote interpersonal collaboration is "influence". Wunderlich et al. (2012) noted that interpersonal collaboration between leaders and team members emerges as an influencer of attitudes and behaviors that enhance firm performance. Gardner (1995) described leadership as one of the critical competencies necessary to take people and organizations through the change process. Sternberg (2007) and Vroom and Jago (2007) also view influence as an important skill, stating that nearly all definitions of leadership make a mention of it.

The relationship between power and influence involves the study of a number of different aspects. Lunenburg (2012) referred to power as the ability to influence others. Lucas and Baxter (2012, p. 49) define power as "the ability to impose one's will even against resistance from others". Position power relates to the control that one has over an organization's resources (Lines, 2007) and the control one possesses over several important staff-related functions such as hiring, dismissals, disciplining staff and authorizing promotions or increase in salaries (Armandi et al., 2003). Power can be used

to influence superiors, subordinates, peers and outsiders alike and may be determined by an individual's personal characteristics concomitant to the situation in which they find themselves (Lucas and Baxter, 2012; Madlock, 2012; Yukl, 1989). Yukl (1989, p. 255) argued that power can be viewed as either potential or actual influence and suggested that "the interaction model (person x position)" provides a better explanation of power than "the additive model (person + position)". Effective leaders make more use of their personal abilities and attributes than the power afforded them by their position in the hierarchy (Yukl, 1989). He also suggested that solutions to work problems proposed by leaders increase their perceived power when those solutions are successful, but reduce it when they fail. The result is often blamed on their lack of good judgment or self-interest. The possession of uncommon skills also adds to the perception of an individual's power.

One aspect of influence that has received attention in the literature is that of social skills. Ewen *et al.* (2013) have argued that most jobs are fixed within a social context and that social skills are proximal predictors of leadership. Zaccaro *et al.* (1991) suggest that these skills include social judgment and decision making as well as persuasion and negotiation abilities. They state that it is these skills that allow leaders to achieve goal-directed consensus. Gardner (1995) and Tait (1996) both described effective communication as another vital leadership skill. Leaders who are effective in communicating have a strong ability to inspire, involve and motivate staff. They achieve this by describing a vision to which the staff can relate and in which they wish to be involved.

Expatriate leadership competencies

Expatriate leadership entails the possession of a number of distinctive competencies. Caligiuri and Tarique (2012) identified three competencies as predictors of performance among expatriates leadership. The first predictor is reduced nationalistic self-centeredness or valuing cultural differences. Ethnocentric leaders interpret and evaluate "behavior using their own standards" and make minimal effort to adapt their behavior to the host country values. The second predictor is cultural flexibility or adaptation. Cultural flexibility is having the capacity to utilize distinct activities in the host country that are different from those in host country. The third predictor is tolerance of ambiguity, which is the ability to "manage ambiguous, new, different and unpredictable situations" (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012, p. 2).

These competencies are consistent with three dimensions of skills relating to successful cross-cultural integration identified by Mendenhall and Oddou (1985). These are relating to self-awareness and relationships, relating to social awareness and the cultivation of relationships with locals and relating to the perception involving the cognition of the cultural environment.

Self-awareness allows expatriate leaders to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and provides the basis for their own relearning and development leading to more effective self-management. Self-awareness enables expatriate leaders to keep their composure and not lose their moorings in difficult situations. This leads to idealized influence and more successful behavior in leadership situations (Deng and Gibson, 2009).

Social awareness enables expatriate leaders to develop relationships. This promotes respect and trust as well as demonstrating sensitivity and the ability to listen which assists in effectively managing relationships (Deng and Gibson, 2009) between

expatriate leaders and local staff. Deng and Gibson (2009) suggested that people skills which they referred to as "soft competencies" may increase the chances of success in expatriate positions. These skills may enhance acceptance of expatriates by the host country staff and improve working relationships. Maurer and Li (2006) suggested that Western expatriates face a unique challenge in fostering good working relationships with the host country staff in successfully achieving organizational objectives. This relationship should define expectations between expatriates and local staff to avoid negative consequences arising from misunderstandings, as these could be perceived as broken promises (Maurer and Li, 2006), which would cause greater friction than any expectations that are seen to be unfulfilled (Rousseau and Schalk, 2000).

Perception involving the cognition of the cultural environment is related to the identification of behaviors appropriate to the host culture. It aids in reducing uncertainty in dealing with the host culture (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). Through experience, people new to another culture can begin to internalize reactions without having to think about them first so that they begin to think and act like a local (Young, 1988), resulting in greater role acculturation (Brislin, 1981). Language skills are a good example of this (Young, 1988).

Leadership in the GCC

With the fast pace of economic development in the GCC spurred on by the financial wherewithal resulting from the development of the petrochemical industry, there has not been sufficient attention by organizations on the value of leadership competencies, and organizations have insufficient knowhow on how to develop leadership skills. In particular, the UAE has arrived at a critical point of its development when further economic performance will depend on the continued advancements in leadership competencies to the global standards. Leaders must succeed in empowering and supporting their organization's team members to be more creative and innovative. The urgency of this need is reflected in the UAE's commitment toward the formation of Competitive Councils with the goal to advance the UAE's competitiveness and prosperity (Sokari *et al.*, 2013).

The UAE as a federation of seven emirates, "each governed by a hereditary emir who together form the Federal Supreme Council", has an estimated 2014 population of 9.44 million. The capital Abu Dhabi, which along with Dubai, makes up the cultural and commercial center of the UAE. The UAE has:

> […] a very diverse population, of which only 13 per cent are UAE nationals with the majority of the population expatriates. The UAE has the highest net migration rate in the world (*World Population Review*, 2014).

Accordingly, expatriate leadership competency is a quintessential research subject for the GCC and in the UAE in particular (Bealer and Bhanugopan, 2014). However, empirical evidence on expatriate managers across the region is limited. In the UAE, for instance, there has only been one study by Bealer and Bhanugopan (2014) surveying expatriate managers regarding their leadership challenges and strategies in addition to the enabling factors for enhanced. Thus, further investigations examining different dimensionalities of expatriate leadership competencies in the GCC are needed to add to the nascent literature.

Private and public organizations in the UAE as in other GCC countries actively recruit and attract expatriate work force at all stratified level of the organization from manual laborers to CEOs. Expatriates predominantly come from the surrounding region; however, a good percentage also comes from the West and Asia. In this multicultural melting pot supervisor – subordinate relationships have added dimensions not present in more homogeneous environments. Thus, performance results can be strained due to the added challenges associated with the assimilation of multicultural team operating in a foreign culture (Butler, 2009).

The cross-cultural dimension of expatriate leadership challenges the notion of universal management practices "because organizational values, beliefs and norms vary across cultures" (Bealer and Bhanugopan, 2014, p. 297). Managerial beliefs, attitudes and behaviors vary among cultures, and these differences require management competencies unique to the context (Bealer and Bhanugopan, 2014). Therefore, it is uncertain how theories in extant literature apply to the UAE.

An expatriate leader working in an organization staffed with employees from diverse cultures would need to be aware of subtle cultural differences and would need to possess distinctive skills and attitudes that can succeed in a multicultural environment (Dubrin and Dalglish, 2003). There are different leadership styles found in the UAE. Arab expatriate managers have a preference for participative management and quasi-consultative decision making. Western expatriate managers tend toward the consultative style of management. While Indians are more authoritative in their management style and tend to resort to coercion and punishment as a mean for maintaining control (Darwish, 2000; Gopalan and Rivera, 1997). Managers of all persuasions who have studied in the West and who especially have experience working for multinational corporations demonstrate Western management practices and behaviors (Syed and Mohammad, 2003). Arabs are consultative by nature but they are selective in who they consult with, and there is not that usual vigor of opposition you sometimes find in Western management of opposition from subordinates. Because of formal organization structures especially stratification along nationalities, managers may not feel obliged and may feel it demeaning to consult with lower-level employees, so they may opt to consult mainly with equals or close colleagues (Dubrin and Dalglish, 2003). Furthermore, Arabs by nature perceive problems differently than their Western counterparts. Arabs tend to have a general expectancy that outcomes are controlled by external environmental factors such as other people, luck or fate which they cannot control; Westerners, on the other hand, tend to have a general expectancy that outcomes are controlled by their own actions or personal effort and that they can control events that affect them (Elanain, 2010).

The forgoing explanations lead to the supposition that leadership competencies and behavior do not transcend cultures (Dubrin and Dalglish, 2003). Leadership behavioral tendencies are diverse, and the interaction within a culturally mixed environment could pose unique challenges and provoke the development of unique skills to combat the resulting strains. Hence, the objective of this research study is to investigate leadership competencies of expatriate managers working within the UAE and identifies if these competencies are unique from the competencies needed in their home country. In addition, the study aims to identify how new competencies expatriate leaders have developed as a result of their current position and how this has enhanced their ability to better manage staff in the UAE.

Methodology

Sample

A qualitative, exploratory and non-probability sampling method was used in this study. The aim was to gather data by interviewing expatriate leaders working in different organizations, industries and vocations in the UAE. Purposive judgment sampling was used to select participants from organizations across both the private and public sectors employing more than 100 staff with a significant number being locals. These organizations were randomly selected from the UAE Business Directory (http://uaebusinessdirectory.com/) and included hospitals, commercial centers and hotels (Table I).

Non-probability judgment sampling entails a significant risk of researcher bias. The sample and the findings derived from the interviews may not necessarily be representative (Zikmund and Babin, 2010). Nevertheless, this research generalized from the sample taken. In total, 25 expatriate executive leaders/managers were interviewed to discover any impacts the culture of the UAE may have had on their style of management and their behavior toward local staff. In total, 15 males and 10 females were interviewed with 11 respondents falling into the 25-34 age grouping. Five respondents were in the 35-44 age grouping, seven nominated their age group as 45-54, while a further two fell into the 55+ group. Educational standards for respondents included 11 bachelor's degrees, 6 master's degrees, 1 doctorate and 7 were non-degree holders. Interviewee nationalities were Indian, Sri Lankan, Australian, British, Pakistani, Russian, Nepalese, Iranian, Filipino, Indonesian and American (Table II). Participants had worked in the UAE between 2 and 30 years with tenures in their current organizations ranging from 1 month to 25 years (three years being the most common response). Jobs held at the time of interview included training managers, assistant outlet managers, assistant training managers, assistant operations managers, quality coordinators, heads of human resources, chiefs of security, facility managers, presidents, CEOs, directors of supply chain management, project managers and store managers.

Procedure

Face-to-face interviews were held. Each organization's most senior manager was given a participation form and was later contacted to confirm their participation. Contact to confirm availability was done through the telephone. Participants were advised that it was intended that their interviews would be voice recorded to aid transcription. Interviews were expected to take between 60 to 90 minutes.

Structured interviews were conducted to learn about management skills. They began with a general question (What critical skills can you identify that have helped you to manage in your current position in the UAE?). This was followed with more specific questions (Are these skills the same that you would have used in your home country? Are there any significant differences in the skills needed in your home country versus

Industries	No. of interviews given	No. of interviews completed	Response rate (%)
Hospitals	15	10	67
Commercial centers	10	5	50
Hotels	12	10	83
Total	37	N = 25	68

Table I.
Distribution of
interviews

Distribution	No. of interviews
Gender	
Male	15
Female	10
Total	N = 25
Nationality	
Indians	8
Sri Lankans	2
Pakistani	2
Nepalese	1
Philippines	3
Indonesian	1
Iranian	1
Australians	4
US	1
British	1
Russian	1
Total	N = 25
Education	
Bachelor's degrees	11
Master's degrees	6
Doctorate	1
Non-degree qualifications	7
Total	N = 25

Table II.
Gender, nationality and education distribution

UAE?). Following these, there were several open-ended questions (What new skills have you developed as a result of your current position that enhanced your ability to better manage staff in the UAE? How were they learned? and What skill do you think is most important in communicating with staff in this organization?).

Findings
Interviewees made 100 statements in response to the interviewer's questions. These 100 statements were categorized into 47 dimensions and grouped into 4 themes, as shown in Tables III-VI.

What critical skills can you identify that have helped you manage in your current position in the UAE?
This question relates to improvement in outcomes, as expatriate leaders improve their abilities by learning and developing skills in assisting them to adjust both to the UAE and organizational culture and to better manage the staff. The majority of the interviewees indicated that leadership, interpersonal and communication skills, including non-verbal or body language skills, assisted them in managing staff in their current position. A manager gave an example of this association:

> […] you just have to keep an open mind and look at different points of view than you would normally do.

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Leadership/interpersonal/ communication ($N = 8$)	Leadership skills, interpersonal skills and communication skills, including non-verbal or body language, assisted me in managing in my current position
Arabic language ($N = 2$)	Learning Arabic was important
English language ($N = 2$)	Knowledge of English is the most important
Management skills ($N = 2$)	Using management skills such as planning and decision making are critical
Technical skills ($N = 3$)	Technical skills were important
Organizational leadership ($N = 4$)	It is important in managing in UAE
Open mind ($N = 2$)	[…] you just have to keep an open mind and look at different points of view than you would normally do
Respect and appreciate point views and consulting ($N = 2$)	Respect the people you work with and appreciate their points of view by consulting with them and appreciate their efforts at the end of the day

Table III.
Leadership competence: skills that help manage in UAE ($N = 25$)

Others stated that technical skills were important. Organizational leadership and technical skills were mentioned by some respondents while other skills identified were financial, systems and time management, teamwork, computer, analytical, problem solving, coaching and Arabic language skills.

Are these critical skills the same ones you would have used in your home country? Are there any significant differences when using these skills in the UAE as compared to your home country?
Only a few respondents stated that they used skills similar to the ones in their home country. Quite a few said that they resorted to different skills. The majority of the interviewees commented that the differences were due to the languages; in the UAE, there is only one formal language while, for example, in India, there are 22 languages. A few Indian managers mentioned that the approaches used in communication in the UAE are different to those they used at home, as many different nationalities reside in the UAE compared to home. A manager from India gave an example of a factor that affected his approach to communication:

Communication in the UAE is centered on groups whereas in India it is more individual-based.

What new skills have you developed as a result of your current position that enhanced your ability to better manage staff in the UAE? How were these new skills learned?
Almost all of the participants mentioned interpersonal and communication skills learned through interaction with Arabic and national staff and the handling of their problems and complaints. Also, dealing with people from many cultures enhanced their communication skills besides self-conducted training. Decision-making skill was also noticed by the respondents. They said that decision making as a new skill had been developed through different methods, including training, experience and emulating their superiors. A few mentioned that they improved their patience and reduced their aggressiveness and standoffishness. A manager gave an example of this association:

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Decision making ($N = 1$)	Decision-making skills we used in India are harsher than those in the UAE
Communication ($N = 4$)	The approaches in communication we used in the UAE are different to those we used at home, as there are many different nationalities in the UAE whereas, at home, there are fewer
Communication centered ($N = 4$)	Communication in the UAE is centered on groups, whereas in India, it is more individual-based
Language ($N = 8$)	The language skills used in my home country is different where there are [22 different languages opposed to UAE where Arabic is the main language]
English language ($N = 1$)	It depends on the situation and where you are working. [If] I am working in a hotel, for sure, I would need to speak in English. If I am working in my own country, I am sure I will go with my own culture and I would not have a hard time in adjusting because I am one of them and here I am different, so it is kind of a different approach and understanding
Management ($N = 1$)	The management skills are different here than in my home country. Here it is due to the difference in culture
Management style ($N = 1$)	I do not know. I have not worked in [my home country of] Iran [but I would imagine that] management skills are different here [than my home country] because [of cultural differences]. Management style could be different. People's backgrounds are different but you can see one standard in management. In Iran, management is more traditional rather than professional. But here in the UAE, it is more professional. At least you have some standards to follow here
Multicultural ($N = 3$)	A small variation of nationalities at home in India [as opposed to UAE]
Collective culture style ($N = 1$)	The style I used in my country will not work here because here is a collective culture and I needed to adapt to this. I am a guest in the UAE but not in my country
Direct explanation ($N = 1$)	Very much the same, really, but there are subtle differences. Here you have to explain a lot more, whereas back home, it would be the same for everybody. Here, whether it is for an Arab person, or a Filipino or an Asian, when you explain, you have to be direct with your explanation. There is no right or wrong way. There has to be directness in your explanation

Table IV.
Leadership competence: difference in skills needed: UAE versus home country ($N = 25$)

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Interpersonal skills and communication skills ($N = 6$)	Interpersonal skills and communication skills were learned by interacting with Arab and Emirate staff and handling their problems and complains Also, I developed my communication skills by dealing with people from many cultures and through self-taught training
Technical skills ($N = 2$)	Technical skills learned from training in various departments in the organization and from workshops
Decision making ($N = 3$)	Decision making as a new skill were developed, however, [it was learned] from different methods including training, experience and emulating superiors
Question people to make the better decision ($N = 1$)	I have learned to question people more when they say something to make sure that I understand what is being said before I act or make a decision. I have had to take a lot more input from people [before making] a decision. I will ask everyone around the table if they came to a decision. I get agreement from certain meetings before we leave the room and then ask them to please repeat what we agree to. [This helps avoid future misunderstanding]
Problem solving/time management ($N = 2$)	I developed my problem solving techniques and time management skills from the general manager and through experience
Coaching skills ($N = 1$)	I improved my coaching skills by effective training and change management skills by experience and involving people in the change
Patience ($N = 2$)	I improved my patience and reduced my aggressiveness and standoffishness
Listening skills ($N = 1$)	I developed my listening skill by becoming a more effective listener as well as using different practices to impress the nationals [I] had helped
Culturally sensitive and respect ($N = 1$)	I am more culturally sensitive to staff–not just Emirate staff and I maintain a certain standard of respect. It was an experimental learning process
Management skills ($N = 1$)	I improved [my management skills] by applying training and practicing on the job
Managerial and leadership skills ($N = 1$)	Of course, definitely, I have improved my managerial as well as leadership qualities working over here. I have gained more experience here. Once you are working here in the UAE, I am sure it is easier now for me to work in any part of the world. Meeting clients and people on an everyday basis makes you stronger and more confident. I learned through a combination of work training as well as experience. Whatever is taught in theory cannot necessarily be put into practice. It is definitely a combination of both. You learn partly through training and theory courses, and then you learn through practical application
Arabic language ($N = 2$)	Arabic language developed through training courses
English language ($N = 1$)	English language improved from interacting with non-Arabic colleagues
Emotional intelligence ($N = 1$)	I improved my Emotional intelligence by understanding how people think and what drives their thinking

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Communication skills ($N = 3$)	Communication skills are vital. Both verbal and non-verbal communication. Communication skills and getting the message across to both staff and customers was the most important. Also, communicating the message, including speaking, writing and reading, in both Arabic and English are essential skills. Informal communication with local staff where message delivery is done in a non-confrontational manner is important. Also, dealing with and handling people from diverse nations and cultures are important
Interpersonal skill ($N = 1$)	Interpersonal skill and making the first move was the most important
Leadership/English ($N = 2$)	Leadership and the English language
Time management ($N = 2$)	Time management was of the greatest importance
Patience ($N = 2$)	Patience in dealing with different nationalities was the most important
Listening ($N = 2$)	I considered listening counted most
Management ($N = 2$)	Managerial skills are critical to perform my job. The basis for my management [style] is that each and every individual is a creation of God, and He values each person, and I have a responsibility as a manager to value each person for what they can contribute and that each one of them is a gift from God to the organization and to me personally
Relationship management ($N = 1$)	Managing relationships with colleagues is vital
Passion and integrity ($N = 1$)	A passion for what you do and integrity in what you say is the most vital
Technical skills ($N = 1$)	Technical skills is important
Customer service ($N = 1$)	Customer service is the most important skill
Problem solving ($N = 1$)	Problem solving is vital
Open mind ($N = 2$)	Having an open mind is essential and giving staff exact requirements
English language ($N = 2$)	English language is vital
Leadership ($N = 2$)	Leadership is important in managing staff

Table VI.
Leadership competence: the most important skills in communicating with staff ($N = 25$)

I have learned to question people more when they say something to make sure that I understand what's being said before I act or make a decision. I've had to take a lot more input from people (before making) a decision. I will ask everyone around the table if they came to a decision. I get agreement from certain meetings before we leave the room and then ask them to please repeat what we agreed to. (This helps avoid future misunderstandings).

Two respondents further suggested that they learned Arabic language from training courses.

What skills are the most important in communicating with staff in your organization?
Most of the respondents mentioned that communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal, are vital. Getting the message across to both staff and customers was viewed as most important. Also, communicating the message using different media,

including speech, writing and reading in both Arabic and English was viewed by some as critical. Informal communication with local staff where message delivery is done in a non-confrontational manner is also important. A few respondents mentioned leadership and the English language. Also, dealing and handling people from diverse nations and culture is another important aspect. But time management appeared to be viewed as being of the greatest importance by many. A few considered patience in dealing with different nationalities as important. A number of participants agreed that managerial skills are critical in the performance of their job. A few mentioned that active listening helped them communicate with their staff in their organization. A manager gave an example of this association:

> Informal communication with local staff where message delivery is done in a non-confrontational manner is important. Also, dealing with and handling people from diverse nations and cultures are important.

In addition, interviewees made 25 statements describing the benefits of leadership competence. Nine categories emerged from the following nine statements:

(1) Performance related gains ($N = 12$).

(2) Knowledge gains ($N = 4$).

(3) Relational gains ($N = 4$).

(4) Networking/social capital gains ($N = 4$).

(5) Socio-political gains ($N = 2$).

(6) Employee attitudes/affect ($N = 4$).

(7) Identity/contentment ($N = 2$).

(8) Culture related gains ($N = 4$).

(9) Skill development ($N = 8$).

The aforementioned categories describe a number of the benefits derived from competent management practices when expatriates adapt well to their new work environment. These benefits include gains in performance, knowledge, relations, networking and social capital, socio-politics, cultural adaptation, enhanced employee attitudes, identity and commitment and skill development.

Performance is improved when employees acquire additional skills and abilities. These gains increase employees' productivity and dispositions. Gains in knowledge enhance competitive advantage, providing the organization with an opportunity for differentiation. Improved working relationships directly affect productivity, increasing output. Improved opportunities for employees to network provide them with a wider sphere of contacts from whom to draw knowledge and, thus, offer greater opportunity for the organization to break new ground.

Socio-political gains mean that the work environment becomes more like a family, facilitating a supportive environment when individuals encounter personal or health issues. Additionally, when employees have a positive regard for their workplace, they develop greater feelings of association with their colleagues and the organization. These feelings of identity and commitment provide employees with feelings of being valued by the organization and that their efforts and commitment are appreciated. Where cultural barriers are reduced or even eliminated, all employees, but especially expatriates, resist

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accepting direction less. When employees are encouraged and incentives are offered, they will be more likely to develop and hone their skills. This has a positive effect on both morale and productivity.

Discussion

Caligiuri and Tarique (2012) have reported that research on expatriate leadership competencies is still in its early stages, and future research should focus on various ways to develop expatriate leaders. Following their recommendation, we believe that this study contributes to research and practice of expatriate leadership competencies. The findings of our study indicate that essential leadership competencies to successfully perform within the multicultural expatriate environment of the UAE are interpersonal and communicative skills. This is consistent with normative research results showing that social skills and interpersonal skills are important leadership qualities (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005; Goleman *et al.*, 2004; Mumford *et al.*, 2007). This is also consistent with results from expatriate leadership research relating to cultivation of relationships (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). Technical skills were also prominently mentioned as an essential leadership competency. This is consistent with research indicating that technical business skills relating to the management of resources, including talent, equipment and finances in devising solutions, are essential leadership competencies (Mumford *et al.*, 2000a).

What is equally interesting is what was not highlighted as an important skill that is the ability to communicate a vision for the future which is noted as an essential leadership competency in normative research. This may be due to frequent policy changes and the dynamic or uncertain environment within the UAE. This can also be attributed to the transient nature of the expatriate workforce. Being able to articulate a vision for the future may not be thought of as an essential trait identified by leaders and equally not be highly regarded by employees who experience constant changes (Bealer and Bhanugopan, 2014). Because of the transient nature of the work environment within the UAE, this may further suggests that employee satisfaction may come from extrinsic factors like work conditions and salary rather than intrinsic factors like challenge of work and personal and profession growth. This indicates that there are different employee expectations and management approaches within the multicultural environment of the UAE.

A difference in mother tongues among the workforce was shown to pose a significant challenge for leaders, and their approaches used in communication are different than they would use in their home countries. This inevitably led leaders to learn new interpersonal and communicative skills to manage staff in addition to seeking improvements in and control of their emotional intelligence which has shown in research to play a role in effective leadership (Goleman *et al.*, 2004; Macaleer and Shannon, 2002; Wolff *et al.*, 2002). Communication was seen to benefit from the use of multiple forms such as the written and oral form. Greater care was shown to be necessary for formulating messages and its delivery to assure that a non-confrontational or non-aggressive style was projected. Thus, due to these considerations, active listening and patients in dealing with different nationalities along with time management skills were also seen as essential managerial skills for enhanced performance.

Overall, our findings suggest that leadership competencies of expatriate managers working within the UAE are unique from those needed in their home country. Additionally, the study identifies that new competencies expatriate leaders have developed while in their current position and how this enhances their ability to better manage staff in the UAE. Furthermore, the study presents data from the UAE for which studies are comparably lacking.

Practical implications, research limitation and future research
This article provides practical advice that may assist successful adaptation for expatriate leaders. It also establishes the crucial competencies and skills required by expatriate leaders in UAE organizations. The study informs the strategic decision-maker on how to enhance expatriates' abilities to interact with host country nationals. Global competitiveness has given rise to increasing need for expatriate leaders to operate effectively in different countries. The study suggests that achieving a global standard of expatriate leadership competencies will entail a higher degree of communication ability, team building qualities and ability to handle local nationals. These factors were found to have a significant effect on expatriate adjustment and success in managing UAE organizations. Organization leadership programs can identify those individuals with the requisite leadership traits such as interpersonal, communication, language and multicultural abilities and offer cross-cultural training to enhance their skills (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012). These specific leadership competency practices can enhance an expatriate manager's ability to lead organizations in the UAE.

Respondents were drawn from a variety of industries and organizations that may have divergent business philosophies and practices. Commonality of industries or of hierarchical levels across organizations may have increased the validity of this research. The respondents were considered a homogenous community, and differences in ethnicity and background were not taken into consideration. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the sample size of 25 interviews is not large. This had the effect of limiting statistical scrutiny to correlation and regression analysis to identify relationships between variables.

Based on the results of this study, a number of recommendations for further research are proposed. Contrasting between private and public sector organizations would offer interesting data and reveal any differences in the proficiencies and abilities expatriate leaders used in UAE organizations in different sectors and the impact of these on their adjustment. This would determine whether expatriates in private organizations adapt better than those in public organizations or vice versa and reveal differences, if any, in adjustment approaches.

In this study interviews were conducted with lower-, middle- and higher-level management. Future research would benefit from focusing on one level of management to allow significant themes to emerge. Samples in this study were taken from a number of different industries, including hospitals, commercial centers and hotels. Future studies should concentrate on one industry instead of multiple industries. Also, future research may benefit from focusing on the occupations of those interviewed.

Conclusion
This study investigated the leadership competencies of expatriate managers working in the UAE. It was determined that leadership skills, interpersonal skills and

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communication and Arabic language skills assisted expatriate managers to manage staff in their current position. A large number of the interviewees indicated that there was a difference between the skills they used in their home country and those they used in UAE organizations. Most of the differences related to language and approaches to communication. The study found that interpersonal and communication skills gained through a number of methods and skills in decision-making were enhanced as a result of expatriates' current tenure. It also found that the most important skills in dealing with the staff are verbal and non-verbal communication skills in both Arabic and English, delivering messages in a non-confrontational manner, interacting with people from diverse cultures, time management and managerial skills.

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